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ABSTRACT

An analysis of indirect object passives in English and their development from Late Old English and Early Middle English suggests that their existence is related to the development of double object constructions. As long as the dative and accusative cases had not merged, neither pronominal nor nominal indirect objects required a preposition; however, once the nominal system case collapsed, nominal indirect objects required a preposition to express their function, while pronominal ones did not. This use led to a grammaticalization of the difference between the two classes of direct objects. When the pronominal case system in turn collapsed the accusative and dative endings, this grammaticalized difference between the two kinds of indirect objects remained. However, by the time the case distinction between accusative and dative was lost for pronouns, a bare pronoun had already been established as a possible realization for an indirect object. Examples of direct object passives without a preposition for the indirect object support the conclusion that indirect passives only appeared after the double object construction became a productive alternative to the active construction with a direct object and a prepositional indirect object. (MSE)

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The Development of Indirect Passives in English *

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WCC

In this paper, I want to show how the existence of indirect object passives in Modern English is related to the development of double object constructions. I present here some of the conclusions I was able to draw from a study of texts from different periods of the history of English, especially from Late Old English and Early Middle English.

I call 'indirect object passive' the construction exemplified in (1.a), where the subject of the passive verb is the indirect object in the corresponding active sentence with a ditransitive verb, either (1.b) or (1.c).

(1) a. John was given a book.

b. [e] gave a book to John.

c. [e] gave John a book.

The existence of passives of indirect objects in a language is dependent either on the language having the possibility of passivizing a prepositional object, in which case we derive (1.a) from (1.b), or on the language having an active double object construction corresponding to the construction with a prepositional indirect object, in which case we can derive (1.a) from (1.c). My first point here is that Modern English indirect passives must be be related to the double object construction (Dative-Shift) of (1.c) rather than to the passive of prepositional objects. The evidence for this claim is twofold.

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First, when the object of a preposition becomes the subject of a passive, the preposition required by the active verb is only very rarely missing in the passive: in my corpus of Modern English (2.a) is the only example of such a deletion (of the preposition **about**), and this sentence is by a speaker of non-standard American English[1]; in all the other examples of prepositional passives, the preposition is stranded, as in (2.b).

(2) Present Day English:

a. she goes, my daughter is being complained.
(Elly S: 75 5 5)

b. and it's got to be dealt with.
(Brad S: 82 1 2)

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Second, passive sentences where the subject would be the object of a prepositional phrase complement of the active verb do not appear any

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earlier in the texts than indirect passive constructions, which we might expect if the latter construction was licensed by the former.

The conclusion must then be that a preposition is required when passivizing a prepositional phrase. But, in the whole corpus I used, I did not find any instance of an indirect passive with a stranded dative preposition, which would be like the ungrammatical sentence of (3).

(3) * John was given the book to.

Therefore indirect passives cannot be taken as derived from active sentences with prepositional dative objects. Passives whose subject is the indirect object of the active verb must then be derived from a double object active construction. These passives do not appear until Early Middle English, and I now present the evidence from the texts.

1. THE DATA

This evidence is rather sparse because indirect passive constructions are actually quite rare, even in Modern American English, where they sound perfectly natural. The Modern English data consists of transcripts of interviews with 6 speakers from Philadelphia, and the other periods are represented by the texts listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. List of the texts used

EOE	Early Old English	Beowulf (a.800)
LOE	Late Old English	Peterborough Chronicle (1122-1154)
EME	Early Middle English	Hali Maidenhad (c.1230)
LME	Late Middle English	Paston Family Letters (1420-1503)
ENE	Early Modern English	Chamberlain Letters (1597-1626)
PE	Present day English	Philadelphia interviews

Out of 642 passive sentences in the Modern English data (abbreviated as PE), only 8 were indirect passives, and for the texts from earlier periods of the history of English, the numbers are even smaller. These are presented in Table 2, and give a total of 45 examples of indirect passives out of 1201 passive sentences.

TABLE 2. Passive of ditransitive verbs

	Indirect passives		Direct passives		
EOE:	0	0%	10	100%	10/53
LOE:	0	0%	2	50%	2/90
EME:	1	33%	2	67%	3/91
LME:	0	0%	4	100%	4/116
ENE:	2	22.2%	7	77.8%	9/209
PE:	8	47%	9	52.9%	17/642
Total:	11		34		45/1201

In the Early Old English text of Beowulf there is no instance of a passive whose subject is the indirect object of the active verb. The Late Old English text of the Peterborough Chronicle contains two sentences which might be interpreted as indirect passives; they are shown in (4.a) and (4.b).

(4) Late Old English:

a. On his time þe Iudeus of Noruuic bohton an christen cild beforen Estren, & pineden him alle þe ilce pining ðaet **ure Drihten was pined**

In this time the Jews of Norwich bought a christian child before Easter, and tortured him all the same tortures that our Lord was tortured
(Translation in Savage: "and pained him all the same pains that our Lord suffered.")
(Peterborough Chronicle, 1137.80)

b. þa namen hi þa men þe hi wenden ðaet ani god hefden. bathe be nihtes & be daeies. carlmen & wimmen. & diden heom in prisun efter gold & syluer. & pined heom. untellendlice pining. for ne uuaeren naeure nan **martyrs swa pined alse hi waeron**

Then they took the people they believed had any goods, both by night and by day, men and women, and put them in prison; they were after gold and silver, and tortured them with unspeakable tortures, for never were martyrs tortured as they were.
(Peterborough Chronicle, 1137.16)

In example (4.a) the relative clause could be considered an indirect passive if the active was really a double object verb (as it seems to be in the active main clause), but actually it is more likely that it is an example of a direct passive and that the construction in the first clause is an example of figura etymologica, where it is **him** and not **alle þe ilce pining** which is the direct object. Both examples (4.a) and (4.b) involve the same verb **pine** "to torture" with its cognate instrumental complement in the figura etymologica construction.

The data included in Table 2 consist only of the instances of ditransitive verbs where both objects are expressed. This was done in order to eliminate passives of direct object where the indirect object is not expressed. However, it turned out that in the earliest instance of indirect passive found in this corpus the direct object is not expressed. This sentence is from the Early Middle English text Hali Meidenhad, and is shown in (5):

(5) Early Middle English:
Hwen þus is of riche, hwet wenest tu of þe poure.
þe beod-wacliche i**ȝ** -even ant biset on vuele.

When it is thus with the rich, what think you of the poor, that are poorly given and provided badly.
(Translation in Furnivall: "When it is thus with the rich, what thinkest thou of the poor, that are indifferently dowered and ill provided for.")
(Hali Meidenhad, Bod. f.55, c1244)

Example (5) involves the verb i**ȝ** **-fen** "to give", and its subject would be the indirect object of the corresponding active sentence.

There are no examples of indirect object passives in the selection of the Pastons Letters that was examined for the Late Middle English period, and only two such examples could be found in the collection of the Chamberlain Letters used as a corpus for the Early Modern English period. These are given in (6):

(6) Early Modern English:
a. They say that the King had a sore bruise with the fall of an horse in running at the ring, for the which he was **let blood** four times.
(Chamberlain Letters. 15, 11, 1599)

b. I assure you **they were very well provided**, for the most part of horse, armor, and apparel, and wanted not their setting forth with feathers, scarves, and other such light wear.
(Chamberlain Letters 23, 15,m 1599)

I should point out that neither of these sentences is a really convincing indirect object passive: (6.a) involves the phrase **to let blood** which may be considered an idiomatic expression, and (6.b) could be given a direct object passive analysis, if derived from "to provide

someone with something" instead of "to provide something to someone", which are both possible interpretations.

For the direct object passives, one of the 2 Late Middle English examples may not be a double object construction either: the construction underlying the passive in (7) can be "to advise somebody of something" with **so** a pro-form for the direct object, but here, **avysyth** can mean "resolved" as well as "informed", in which case the passive is a lexical form which would not be derived from a ditransitive verb.

(7) Late Middle English:
and thow I a-low hym all his askyng it is but xxvj s. vj d. lesse, but I am nojth **so avysyth** jytt.

and though I allow him everything he asks it is only 26 shillings 6 pence less, but I am not so informed [or 'so resolved'] yet.
(Pastons Letters 18.1, Agnes Paston 1449)

2. DITRANSITIVE VERB CONSRUCTIONS

In Old English there were a few instances of the construction with an accusative direct object and the preposition **to** + indirect object, but it was limited to a small set of ditransitive verbs: **cwedan, sprecan, bringan, laetan, niman, sendan**, but all the other ditransitive verbs (e.g. **taecan** or verbs meaning "to give") took an accusative and a dative object without a preposition (Mitchell, 1985:1210).

Of the examples of direct object passives of double object verbs, the 2 instances in the Early Middle English text, and 4 out of the 7 in the Early Modern English text do not have a dative preposition before the indirect object. These examples are presented in (8) and (9). The important thing to notice is that in all these cases, the indirect object is a pronoun.

(8) Early Middle English:
a. þin is þe mare strengdhe to halden. & schal wid mare mede beo **þe for-golden**

thine is the more strength to preserve, and shall be requited thee with a higher reward.
(Hali Meidenhad Bod. f.56v c1244)

b. Ah hit is ilich þt. þt **ham is bihaten**. to singen wid engles.

and it is like that is promised to them, to sing with angels.
(Hali Meidenhad Bod. f.59 c1244)

(9) Early Modern English:

a. But news came yesterday that they had made their appointment, and that Tyrone out of his merciless bounty had granted them leave to bury their dead and to go away with all they had, so that the fort might be **delivered him**;
(Chamberlain Letters. 6, 7, 1598)

b. He makes great provision for horses, and many are **presented him.**
(Chamberlain Letters. 16, 12, 1599)

c. The rendezvous for Hertfordshire men was to be at Tottenham, the 12 of this month, and so forward to Tilbury or somewhither else as should be **enjoined them**.
(Chamberlain Letters. 22, 13, 1599)

d. Sir Thomas Gerrard was appointed Colonel of the Londoners, but for an old grudge since the last Parliament they would none of him, whereupon the Earl of Cumberland **was given them** to have charge of them and the River,
(Chamberlain Letters. 22, 14, 1599)

Although the number of examples is small, the fact that the indirect objects which are realized without a preposition are all pronominal led me to the hypothesis that the explanation for the spread of the double object constructions for ditransitive verbs probably resides in the way the case system collapsed. The pronominal paradigm retained case markings for the dative longer than the nominal paradigms, and this delay in the collapse of the case system for nouns and for pronouns is reflected in the difference in the use of prepositions with indirect object NPs or indirect object pronouns.

I therefore examined the active ditransitive sentences from the same corpus to check this hypothesis and the results are presented in Table 3. This table gives the number of instances where the indirect object was realized as a full NP or as a pronoun, either with or without a preposition$_3$. It shows the distribution of ditransitive verb constructions in the texts for the Late Old English and Early Middle English periods (the Peterborough Chronicle and Hali Meidenhad), which is the time period when the case system was collapsing.

TABLE 3. Active ditransitive constructions

	LOE	%	EME	%
Pro. no prep.:	25	96.1%	17	85.0%
Pro. prep.:	1	3.8%	3	15.0%
N =	26		20	
NP. no prep.:	15	75.0%	1	12.5%
NP. prep.:	5	25.0%	7	87.5%
N =	20		8	
Total =	46		28	

Table 3 shows that in LOE, most indirect objects, whether they are full NPs or pronouns, do not take a preposition (75% and 96.1%). However, we see that there is a dramatic reversal in EME for NPs and that the majority of full NPs indirect objects do take a preposition (87.5%), while indirect object pronouns are still mainly realized without a preposition (85%).

3.THE REANALYSIS

As long as the dative and the accusative had not merged, pronominal indirect objects did not have a preposition and neither did nominal indirect objects.

Once the nominal case system collapsed, nominal indirect objects required a preposition to express their function, while pronominal ones did not. This led to a grammaticalization of the difference between nominal and pronominal indirect objects.

When the pronominal case system in turn collapsed the accusative and the dative endings, this grammaticalized difference between the two kinds of indirect objects remained. But by the time the case distinction between accusative and dative was lost for pronouns, a bare pronoun had been already established as a possible realization for an indirect object.

Riemsdijk (1981) and Emonds (1985) present arguments for an analysis of case-marked arguments where a complement marked with the dative case is really a PP with an empty preposition. Following such an analysis, as long as the the pronominal system retained a dative case, pronominal indirect objects were PPs, whether a preposition was expressed or not. After the accusative/dative distinction disappeared for pronouns, pronominal indirect objects could be considered to be NPs, while nominal indirect objects which almost always had a preposition were obviously PPs. A pronominal internal argument must be closer to the verb than a nominal one, and if the first object in a ditransitive construction was a pronoun, it could be reanalyzed as an NP. This is also the structure of the non-shifted construction where the indirect object PP follows the direct object NP. However, once the indirect object can be realized as an NP rather than a PP, then it is

available for passivization.

The examples of direct object passives without a preposition for the indirect object support the conclusion that indirect passives only appeared after the double object construction became a productive alternative to the active construction with a direct object and a prepositional indirect object. The difference in the proportion of indirect objects realized as pronouns without a preposition compared with the number of indirect objects realized as nominals without a preposition between Late Old English and Early Middle English supports the hypothesis that an important factor in the development of indirect passives in English was the delay between the collapse of the nominal and pronominal case systems, and the requirement that a bare pronominal internal argument must be closer to the verb than either a nominal internal argument or a PP. These factors made possible the reanalysis of a former dative (i.e. a PP) into an accusative (i.e. an NP).

NOTES

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1. I am grateful to Tony Kroch for allowing me to use this data, assembled and transcribed under grant NIE-G78-0169.

2. The corpus for EOE, LOE, EME and LME are the Oxford Text Archive editions of the manuscripts. For further reference, see Estival 1986.

3. There were also a few cases where the indirect object was relativized: 2 in LOE, 1 with a preposition and the other without; 1 in EME, with a preposition. They were not included in the table, as it is not clear whether they should have been counted as NPs or as pronouns.

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